

# SECTION NINE:

## **Parks & Recreation**



### **BENCHMARK INCORPORATED**

*LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES*

*Planning, Community Development and Management*

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*Kannapolis, NC / Kinston, NC / Columbia, SC  
209 Centergrove Road PO Box 430 Kannapolis, NC 28083  
(704) 933-5990*

Although there are many recreational facilities located in Catawba County, none are currently County-sponsored or maintained. In 1997, a study was completed by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments detailing the existing park facilities in the area. This study shows the number and types of facilities that are found in the communities throughout the County.

### **Catawba County Parks and Recreation Facilities**

There are several public and private recreation centers, parks, and other facilities in the County. The recently completed Parks Inventory details the public and private recreation centers, parks, and other facilities located in the County. In addition to the community parks and centers, many schools are used as recreational facilities. Most of the elementary schools offer playgrounds and playing fields for use by the public. Also, some of the athletic facilities at the local middle and high schools are offered on a rental basis, however demand is high so they tend to fill up quickly.

Access to the Catawba River, Lake Hickory, Lookout Shoals, and Lake Norman is somewhat limited. There are five public boat launches in the County and fourteen private establishments that offer access to the aforementioned water bodies. However, the closest public swimming area to Catawba County and its lakes is located in Iredell County and is open only on a limited basis.

Greenways, along with bike, nature, and walking trails are types of passive recreational uses which are limited in Catawba County. Hickory has implemented a greenway/trail program that links City Park and Geitner/Rotary Park. This is then connected to Hilton Park by sidewalks and in turn offers access to a natural wetland and creek, as well as additional trails. Consideration has been given to the US 321 Corridor for use as 'Resource Conservation' area due to floodplain and wetland characteristics. However, throughout the rest of the County these types of uses are scarce.

There are several private facilities which offer a variety of recreational uses, programs, and opportunities to the residents of their respective communities. These facilities include the Hickory Foundation YMCA, the Adrian L. Shuford Jr. YMCA in Conover, and four community recreation organizations; Mountain View Recreation, Inc., St. Stephens Optimist Club, Startown Optimist Club, and the Sherrills Ford Optimist Club. There are also several golf and tennis clubs located in the County that operate on a public, semi-public, and private

basis.

Catawba County is currently developing its first public park. Riverbend Park, to be located on a 475 acre tract of land on the Catawba River has been allocated over \$200,000 in funding from the Board of Commissioners and another \$200,000 through a grant from the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF). The park will offer many passive pursuits such as walking, hiking and jogging trails, horseback and biking trails. There will also be limited river access and observation platforms. The park is scheduled to open in the summer of 1999. There is one other potential park located in the Mountain View community at Bakers Mountain. If funded, this park will be similar to, although not as large as, the new Riverbend Park.

Another opportunity for Catawba County in providing a variety of recreational facilities has recently emerged. Duke Power has offered to area counties (Catawba included) various tracts of land with waterfront access along Lake Norman, Lake Hickory the Catawba River, etc. Among the more promising tracts in Catawba are a 12 acre tract on Slanting Bridge Road and a 128 acre tract on Island Point Road.

In the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan (also known as SCORP: Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) prepared by the North Carolina Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources, an inventory of the parks & recreation facilities in Catawba County has been compiled and compared to the other counties in the State. This comparison is now the State's basis for the level of service for public parks and recreation facilities.

The level of service standards in the SCORP are determined differently from previous years. In the past there was a pre-designed set of standards for each type of facility. This was considered too broad and was therefore changed to a new format. The new study shows that Catawba County ranks 50<sup>th</sup> overall in public recreation acreage and facilities in relation to residents per acre. As shown on Table 9.1, Catawba County (including its municipalities) is adequately serving its citizens with some parks and recreation facilities but are behind the State medians in other areas. These figures are based on the rankings of the County, including municipalities, in individual categories such as local park acres, baseball fields, trail miles, etc. Therefore some 'deficiencies' may be in recreation services that Catawba County does not intend to enter into because they are considered a municipal service or facility.

**Table 9.1**  
**Public Recreation Acreage and Facility Needs Assessment (including municipalities)**

Type of Acreage or Facility	Total Supply	Residents Per Unit		
		Catawba County	State Median	Rank
Local Park Acres	651	184	309	25
Regional Park Acres	0	n/a	0	39
Dispersed Use Acres	1,853	65	8	69
Baseball Fields	8	14,980	11,370	59
Basketball Courts	9	13,315	11,499	54
Campsites, Tent & Trailer	300	399	513	43
Football Fields	1	119,837	54,337	60
Golf Courses	6.5	18,436	20,934	45
Playgrounds/Totlots	7	17,120	9,752	73
Soccer Fields	9	13,315	22,076	38
Softball Fields	11	10,894	11,260	48
Swimming Pools	6	19,973	52,943	20
Tennis Courts	31	3,866	3,996	47
Trail Miles	3.3	36,873	7,823	78

Source: North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan, NCDEHNR

### **Operating Budgets**

The N.C. Plan also examines the operating budgets of the Parks & Recreation Departments in each county. With the development beginning at the Riverbend Park, the County has authorized an operating budget of \$53,112 for FY 1998-1999. *It is important to note that this year's County budget is artificially low because Riverbend Park has yet to open.* This

compares favorably with Johnston and Pitt, both of which do not have an operating Parks & Recreation Department (tables 9.2 & 9.3). However, it also shows that Iredell, Buncombe, and New Hanover have extensive budgets that are at a relatively low cost per capita. This is based on the county departments only. When municipalities are factored in, the cost per capita rises dramatically.

**Table 9.2**  
**Recreation Department Expenditures (County Only)**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>Per Capita Operating Budget</b>
Catawba	\$53,112	\$.44*
Iredell	\$354,528	\$3.68
Johnston	\$0	\$0
Buncombe	\$646,638	\$3.66
New Hanover	\$712,386	\$5.78
Pitt	\$0	\$0

Source: North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan, NCDEHNR. *\*It is important to note that this figure is artificially low because Riverbend Park has yet to open.*

**Table 9.3**  
**Local Recreation Department Expenditures**  
**(Including Municipalities)**

<b>County</b>	<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>Per Capita Operating Budget</b>
Catawba	\$2,528,302	\$21.10*
Iredell	\$1,930,399	\$20.03
Johnston	\$745,234	\$8.87

Buncombe	\$5,436,140	\$30.76
New Hanover	\$3,973,892	\$32.23
Pitt	\$3,002,663	\$27.32

Source: North Carolina Recreation Plan, NCDEHNR. *\*It is important to note that this figure is artificially low because Riverbend Park has yet to open.*

### **VisionQuest 2010 Applicability**

The County's Comprehensive Plan, VisionQuest 2010 describes the County's Parks and Recreation Goal as follows: *"To enhance the quality of life in Catawba County by ensuring that all County residents be given opportunities for recreation and the enjoyment of public open space."* VisionQuest also lists five policies and three recommended actions related to parks, recreation and open space. These have been addressed as part of the Growth Strategies Report.